

Book and Software Reviews / Critiques de livres et de logiciels

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- 10 *Se donner le mot : trousse pédagogique.* (2008). Montréal: Groupe ECP Nouveaux Medias. CAD\$90 (CAD\$150 outside Québec).

15 The title of this multimedia learning package is an example of what the package is about: French idiomatic expressions whose meanings do not boil down to their component words. *Se donner le mot* translates unpredictably as 'pass the word on,' and passing some words on to French learners is what this collection of software and support tools aims to do. However, the words are not single items but 40 colourful expressions, from *être dans de beaux draps* ('to be in nice sheets,' or in a fix) to *au bout du rouleau* ('at the end of your roll,' or out of money), that every French speaker knows and learners apparently need to know.

20 The coherence, quality, and variety of this *didacticiel* answer the complaint of many French teachers that e-materials for learning French are typically unprincipled, short, and hard to integrate into a sequence. *Se donner's* learning principles are well thought out, and the package provides a comprehensive set of integrated lessons (or supplements) that could run over a year, or even two.

25 Each expression is introduced through a humorous two-minute video skit performed by Québec actors Christopher Hall and Pierre Verville. Within the sustained metaphor of a vaudeville cinema, each skit revolves around an idiomatic expression. The expression recurs at least seven times in what I would call a video concordance. Its imagistic potential is exploited mnemonically (in *Accorder ses violons*, Hall plays an air violin against an accompaniment of exaggerated violin music). Learners watch the skit, grasp the global meaning, identify the recurring expression, infer its particular meaning, and only at the end meet a definition (*accorder ses violons signifie se mettre d'accord*, "'tune their violins" means come to an understanding').
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40 Learners then reinvest their knowledge of the expression in up to 46 practice and transfer activities, in the classroom (with teaching suggestions and photocopiable grids) or at home (on the Web,

at www.sedonnerlemot.tv). Finally, learners use the expression in a structured role-play with themselves as the actors.

45 How does all this look to a French teacher? I lent my copy of *Se donner* to a teacher for a judgement, and to my positive impressions she added that it is rare to find Canadian materials of this quality for teaching French and that the Anglophone origins of Hall would be a
50 motivator for her particular learners. However, she also noted that the package is not really meant for beginners. Indeed, it is true that we do not know much about the intended audience for this material, except that they are “over 14 years old and interested in French.”

55 Some mini-research shows that the teacher has a point. Vocabprofil analysis (www.lextutor.ca/vp/fr/) traces 41 of *Se donner*'s 97 content words to well beyond the most common 3,000 families of French. However, the sequence starts with higher-frequency items such as *pain* ('bread'), *langue* ('tongue'), *feu* ('fire'), and *emploi* ('job') and only gradually moves toward *âne* ('ass'), *crochet* ('crochet hook'), *sabler* ('to sand' or 'to sandblast'), and *rate* ('spleen'). A teacher can probably
60 pick and choose for most levels.

65 A critique from applied linguists may be harder to beat, that while idiomatic expressions are fun for (English) teachers, they are not necessarily useful for learners (O'keefe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007, p. 80). Idioms tend to be extremely low in frequency and to be built on non-generative grammars (permitting *by and large* but forbidding
70 **it is raining a cat and a dog*). By running *Se donner*'s 40 expressions through a Google search, I learned that some are more frequent than others (381,000 hits for *avoir la langue de bois*, 'to have a wooden tongue' or speak incomprehensibly, down to 0 for *avoir le physique d'emploi*, 'be suited to the job'). So maybe colour trumps need in some of the selections.

75 The problem of idiomatic English grammars, on the other hand, does not seem to translate into a problem for French idioms – not these, anyway. Most of the 40 expressions appear in a Google search through a normal range of conjugations or declensions: *donner sa langue au chat* ("to give the cat your tongue" or not know what to say) appears 6,230 times as an infinitive but 26,700 times as *je donne ma langue au chat*. Indeed, one of the reinvestment activities involves
80 ringing the grammatical changes.

I thus end with my initial impression, that *Se donner le mot* is a major contribution to the repository of learning resources for French. I would just add that because the materials do not contain a word of English, they are best used with a teacher. Being told that *monter sur ses grands chevaux* ['getting on one's high horse'] signifie *s'emporter tres*

85 *vite* [means 'getting carried away,' angering] isn't much help if you don't know French already! A little judicious use of English would increase the box office.

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Reference

O'keefe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007). *From corpus to classroom: Language use and language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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Tom Cobb, *Université du Québec à Montréal*

100 **BonPatron** – www.bonpatron.com – Nadaclair Language Technologies (2001–2009)

105 Si la recherche sur l'apprentissage des langues secondes ne voit pas l'erreur comme un échec, mais plutôt comme une étape, l'autocorrection à l'écrit est la solution qui semble le mieux répondre aux besoins de nombre d'apprenants du français langue seconde.

110 Après avoir distingué et différencié un certain genre et nombre d'erreurs que l'on retrouve dans les écrits soumis aux professeurs au niveau élémentaire, Bélanger (1991) a repris les résultats de nombreuses analyses effectuées par des spécialistes dans le domaine de l'enseignement pour proposer des solutions susceptibles d'encourager un système de correction efficace. Selon Bélanger (1991), les notions reliées au genre des noms, aux prépositions et à l'emploi des verbes auxiliaires et aux formes fléchies en général sont parmi les erreurs répertoriées qui reviennent le plus souvent et auxquelles il faut trouver une solution efficace afin d'éradiquer une forme qui risque fortement de se fossiliser, c'est-à-dire de devenir incorrigible. Les meilleurs résultats s'obtiennent dans une situation où l'apprenant joue un rôle déterminant dans la correction et la gestion de ses propres erreurs.

120 C'est ici que s'inscrit l'interface créée par les professeurs Nadasdi et Sinclair avec les produits de leur compagnie, Nadaclair Language Technologies (2001-2009). *BonPatron*, leur correcticiel en ligne, propose une intervention par étapes dans la rédaction et la correction virtuelle aux personnes soumettant leurs textes au filtre de la technologie.

125 Les deux chercheurs se sont donné comme mandat d'offrir un outil de rédaction et d'autocorrection, accessible et souple, sous deux